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THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN WARRIOR

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WE ARE IN THE SMALL LIVING ROOM OF BO GRITZ'S modest home in Westchester, an aging tract community near Los Angeles Airport. He is wearing a T-shirt and on his bulging left biceps a bald eagle flutters its wings every time Bo moves a finger. He sits erect, his blue eyes fixed on me, and his muscular body is so charged with energy that I can feel it radiating across the narrow room. Over the fireplace mantel is a framed certificate from the American Council on Karate Instruction, which has awarded Bo its highest honor, a sixth degree in black belt.

Earlier this year, Bo Gritz was jailed in Bangkok following an abortive attempt to rescue the American prisoners of war that some believe are still held captive in Laos. Soon after, Bo discovered the perils of becoming the subject of a news blitz. In a fortnight, he fell from hero to villain, accused not only of having squandered money allegedly solicited from POW families but also of falsely raising their hopes in futile, quixotic ventures. Other charges held that his raids had probably forced the Laotian government to kill any POWs still in captivity.

In the ensuing barrage of accusations, Bo Gritz suddenly found that he had lost his voice. No one seemed to be interested in his denials or his background. But who is Bo Gritz? And what does he have to say?

James Gordon "Bo" Gritz was 5 years old when his father, a B-17 bomber pilot, was shot down over Europe during World War II. His mother, a pilot with the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), would later marry a master sergeant and remain with the occupation forces in Germany after the war. Bo was brought up by his maternal grandparents in Enid, Okla.

"When my father was fighting the Germans," Bo says, smiling, "I was fighting the Japs. We had a big wheat field in front of our house, and I'd hide in there. I always saw myself in a jungle environment. There was a dirt runway, and I had a P-51 Mustang and lived in a grass hut with a brown woman. Every morning, I'd put on my leather jacket, get into my aircraft and fly off to do combat against the enemy all day long."

Instead of attending high school, Gritz chose Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia. During his senior year, he was named corps commander. That summer, he passed a competitive exam for West Point and learned to fly. Then one day he saw a poster that changed his life. It said: "The Green Bereted Special Forces are the world's toughest troopers."

Although they only accepted sergeants and above, Bo was admitted contingent on his passing all the schools. These included regular basic training, advanced individual, parachute and the Special Forces "Q" courses that teach unconventional warfare—that is, sabotage, subversion, guerrilla tactics and the related crafts of weaponry, intelligence, communication, medicine and demolition. Bo's specialty was demolition. Each 12-man detachment is designed to equip, train, lead and organize a guerrilla force of 1500 men.

From Special Forces school, Gritz went on to OCS to be commissioned a second lieutenant. Yet he was still not through with school. He insisted on Ranger training. "To me, all this training was a labor of love. Special Forces is a mistress, I used to tell my men, something to be loved. There's nothing sweeter than the camaraderie of men working together toward a common goal. But it's a fickle mistress, because at some time in your life, she'll leave you, and no matter how you may long for her, she'll be out of reach."

What is remarkable about Bo's early success is that he was twice court-martialed during basic training—

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